

NORTHERN ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION.

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BY THE PRESIDENT

MR. FRANK W. RICH,

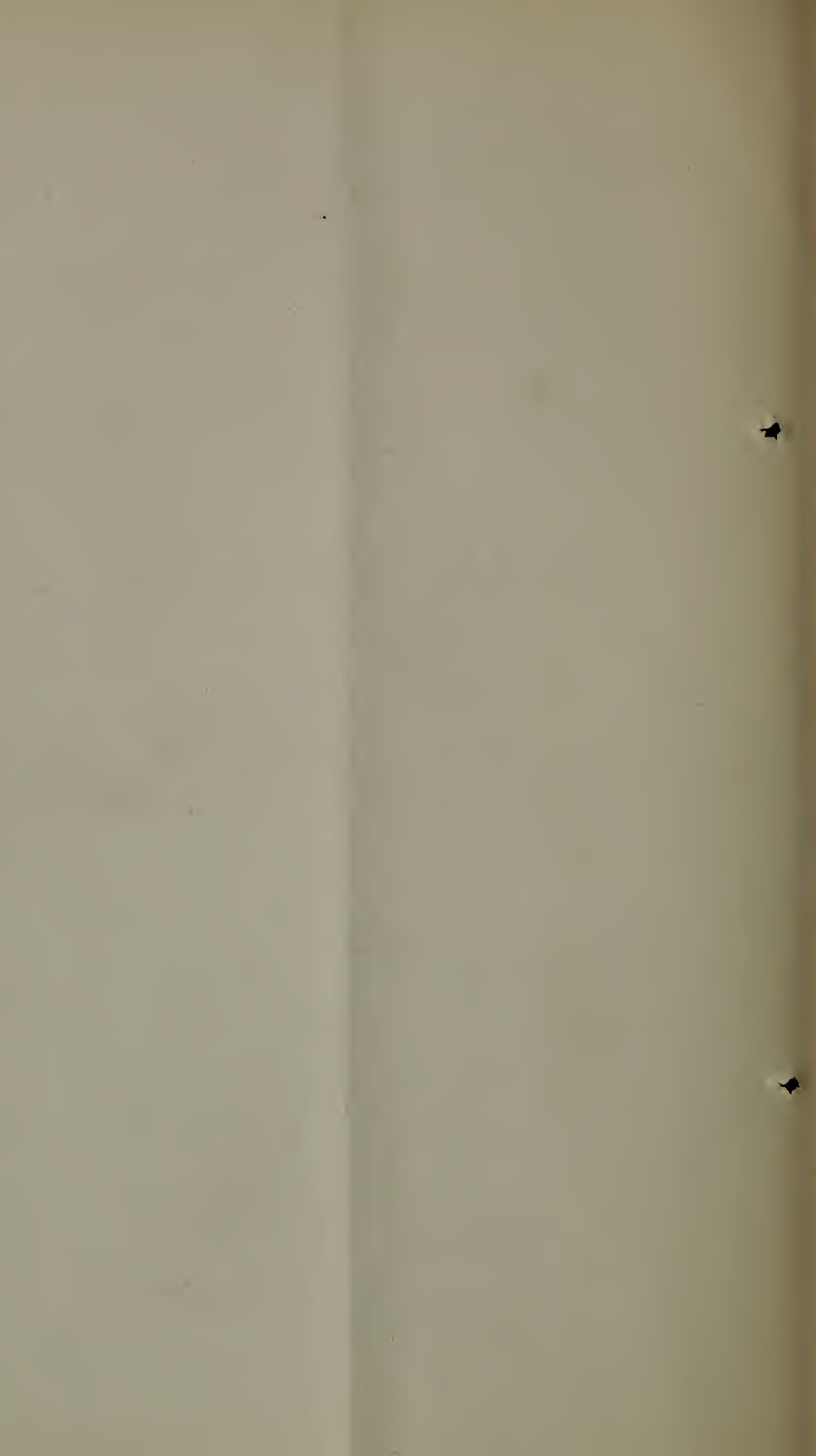
AT A

GENERAL MEETING OF THE MEMBERS, HELD AT THE ART GALLERY,
NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE, 17TH NOVEMBER, 1897.

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NORTHERN ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION.

39TH SESSION.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS,

BY THE PRESIDENT.

Mr. FRANK W. RICH,

17th November, 1897.

In addressing a few words to the Members of the Northern Architectural Association this evening, the Opening Meeting of the 39th Session, I am forcibly reminded it is fourteen years since I last had the honour of addressing you as President.

Many changes have happened since that time. Mr. THOMAS OLIVER was then our Secretary—a man who has done as much for the Association as possibly all of us put together. For to pilot our ship so many years as he did, in the beginning, and shallow waters of callous circumstances, was no easy task.

Fourteen years ago, and for many years previously, we held our meetings in the Old Castle, and we shall always be under a debt of gratitude to the Society of Antiquaries in allowing us to hold our meetings there. We did not, I remember, seem to relish our meetings in the Old Castle. They seemed to throw a sadness over us, for, although much of our studies are bound up with antiquarian research, yet as Architects we always felt our practice lay more with the present than with the past—that we were, in fact, men “up to date,” ready to grapple at any moment with the endless exigencies of a great commercial age, so we quitted the Old Castle, and sought a habitation elsewhere, broadened our policy, founded a library, and helped on the education of our younger students, and have schemes for still further helping them; have established the custom of holding meetings at buildings, either finished or in progress; of holding lectures, &c. All this has brought us much more in touch with each other, and made us good friends.

There are yet two other matters in abeyance which would still go further to complete us (1) The having our own premises in fee simple, where we could have our Meeting Room, which could also serve as a room for the exhibition of Architectural works, examinations, &c., rooms for study, library, and possibly a museum of matters connected with Architecture; and (2) The establishment of the custom of holding an Annual Dinner, worthy of the dignity of the Association, where we could all meet on common ground, and where we could dispense that hospitality for which all British communities are famous.

I am tempted into making these remarks, on thinking over the fourteen years to which I have alluded, which still further suggests the propriety of glancing over a more lengthy period, one of which we have heard a good deal this year, a period that will be memorable in British history (I allude, of course, to the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen), and although the Northern Architectural Association joined in a loyal address to Her Majesty on that occasion, yet in all that has been said in nearly every community as to the progress that has developed during Her Majesty's reign, we have never had an occasion, or the opportunity, of saying a word for the progress of the Architecture of the North, and particularly of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This may be said to be our misfortune, and not our fault.

It may be interesting to glance hurriedly, with an Architectural eye, over the famous sixty years, and see how Newcastle-upon-Tyne comes through the ordeal—to see whether our Architecture has anything to say for itself over this period. There may be, possibly, none of us here who can recall Newcastle sixty years ago. We must, therefore, go back to records for a few years.

In the year of Her Majesty's Accession, Newcastle would wear an entirely different aspect to the Newcastle of the present day. The boundaries of the town at that time might roughly be taken to extend on the West, to the west end of Thornton Street; on the North, to Leazes Terrace; on the East, to Ellison Place; and on the South, to the River Tyne. It is easy to compare this with its present dimensions. It is, however, quite outside the intention of this Address to give any statistics as to population, number of houses, length of streets, &c., but merely to glance at its Architectural quality. The growth of the city is not due to Architecture, but to the great commercial spirit that is now upon us. Architecture is the handmaid who attends upon all great epochs, marking down in granite, marble, or stone the aspirations of the people who at that particular time guided the destinies. It was so in Egypt of old, India, Assyria, Greece, Rome, and of that great Cathedral building age from Constantine to the fourteenth century, and others, with many modifications; and so it is with our city, but in a modest way. True, we have no enormous Temples, Triumphal Arches, Forums,

Colosseums, and the like, but we have evidence of a determined individual energy, which has awakened up the old place into being one of the busiest and most prosperous cities of the kingdom.

There are two broad circumstances which may account for this prosperity (1) the district is celebrated for its great mineral wealth (2) the birth of the Railway system, this latter circumstance being most intimately associated with this district, and here we have the starting point of my remarks.

Newcastle, a little previous to the time we start (1837), was but a moderate sort of place, sleepy in a way, something like the keels that used to glide down the Tyne at high tide, with their heaped up cargoes of coals, as compared with the present craft. There was the Castle, the older Churches, All Saints', St. Thomas', and the Assembly Rooms. A quaint old place it must have been, and crammed full of History. But at this anterior period to the great epoch under review, there was born a man who was destined to work a transformation of the old place, one of those men of indomitable will, one of those great captains of industry for which Newcastle is so justly celebrated. I allude to RICHARD GRAINGER, sometimes called the Architect of modern Newcastle—a position to which I don't think he ever aspired, but who had the good sense to call to his aid the Architects of his native town, and to imbue them with the enthusiasm of which he possessed so large a store. He must have been a bold man, and a shrewd one; his plans were most ambitious and gigantic, and his Architects responded to the call, as, indeed, all men of art have done at all times, when not beset with hampering circumstances.

GRAINGER was well on with some of his schemes at the time of Her Majesty's Accession, and the making of the great railways may be said to synchronize with this.

After these preliminary remarks, we may now look at some of the Architecture of modern Newcastle, of that coming within the famous sixty years, and see what account our friends, living or dead, can give of themselves.

As a means of better realizing what I am about to say, we may imagine ourselves arriving by train at our Central Station. Here we are at once confronted by a famous building, the work of our first President, Mr. JOHN DOBSON; a building designed in the very beginning of the railway system, when no one could foretell its gigantic growth. Other railway stations in Britain have become obsolete, and swept away to give place to modern structures; but this building, designed fifty years ago, is to-day as useful as if built yesterday. Coming out into Neville Street, we obtain a fine view of the Station, a building, from the Clock Tower to the west end, full of dignity. It is a matter of regret to us all that Mr. DOBSON's original majestic design for the portico (which now hangs in the Museum of Natural History) was not carried out instead of the

existing portico ; and an equal matter of regret that the Eastern extension of the Station should not have been carried out on the lines of the original design, instead of the sort of coal depôt roof lately erected. For these matters the Directors must be blamed, and ought to be heartily ashamed of themselves. I make these remarks because I believe it echoes the views of all Architects, and also in defence of the able man who designed the original building.

The view from this spot as a "townscape" is somewhat unique. In looking to the east, we bring into view Collingwood Street and Mosley Street, up to the Arcade, and in which the famous tower and spire of the Cathedral groups well.

Looking in a more northerly direction, a similar view is obtained of Grainger Street, with the domes of the Exchange, and the equally admirable Monument to Earl GREY, closing the vista.

We may now walk down Neville Street, and in doing so one cannot forget the change that has been effected in so short a time. One can remember Neville Street so well before Grainger Street was cut through, when all the buildings round about were old time buildings, and now nearly every one of them are new. The street, as we all know, is a very spacious one, broadening out very considerably at the Monument to GEORGE STEPHENSON, and, with the modern buildings now erected here, forms as fine an entrance to a city as will be difficult to beat. The entrance into London from King's Cross is shabby compared with it, as is the case in many of our principal cities. The buildings from the Douglas Hotel to the Offices of the Standard Insurance Company are all modern business premises, save one ; and on the other side of the street is the very large hotel lately erected by the North-Eastern Railway Company. The Union Club faces us as we proceed, forming a fine group with the Offices of the *Newcastle Chronicle*, Messrs. EMLEYS', and the Offices of the Union Insurance Company. The mention of the Offices of the *Chronicle* remind me of my early professional life, over thirty years ago, when this building was designed by my old master, Mr. PARNELL, a member of our Association. Before that time, it was the town house of DIXON DIXON, of Unthank. To the south, where once stood the picturesque old Westmorland house, we have the Offices of the Coal Trade, a very fine design by our ex-president, Mr. ARCHIBALD DUNN.

We now enter Collingwood Street, which, when I knew it first, was entirely residential. It is now something like the City of London, bereft of residents. The building that chiefly arrests our attention is the very fine Bank, lately erected by Messrs. HODGKIN & Co. It is a stately and thoroughly gentlemanly building, and reflects the greatest credit on a lamented colleague (Mr. ROBERT JOHNSON) and the liberal-minded Directors with whom he was associated. A very fine block opp site--the Offices of the Northern Assurance Company,

by the same artist. I must not forget a small building to the east of the Bank, which was designed by Mr. PARNELL, and was the first break into the residential quality of this street, and for many years stood high above the rest of the buildings. This building was designed for Mr. EDWARD GLYNN, who, besides his position in the Legal Profession, was well known for his admiration of the Fine Arts, Music, and the Drama, and for his charitable work. We now come to St. Nicholas' Square, where the townscape is again very fine, and one is tempted to describe it; but we must confine ourselves to buildings coming within the limits of the period we have allowed ourselves. On the one hand we have the Town Hall Buildings, stretching from the Square into the Bigg Market, occupying the site of some very quaint old houses, which I remember very well; and, on the other, the street called the High Level Approach, a very extensive range—the High Level Buildings (the work of Mr. PARNELL), and, opposite, a picturesque block of Offices by a past President (Mr. JOHN JOHNSTONE.)

Coming into Mosley Street, and proceeding half way, we come to a famous corner, one that would be difficult to equal in any provincial city.

At this particular spot, the meeting of Mosley Street, Dean Street, and Grey Street, there is food for contemplation, as each corner presents something worth seeing. At one, the National and Provincial Bank, by the late JOHN GIBSON; another, the new building of the Prudential Assurance Co., by Mr. WATERHOUSE; and at the corners of Grey Street we have the start of what we call the Grainger Buildings, which we will notice further on. At the head of Mosley Street stands the Arcade, one of GRAINGER's ambitious projects, and a stately termination to the street.

Passing down Dean Street, and under the very fine arch, which carries the North-Eastern Railway—a credit to Engineers—one wonders why they did not carry the railway on one of the terrible utilitarian structures they delight in, floating in the air like a spider's web, and proportionately ephemeral; but this is a good, honest arch. Passing under this one sees on all sides new buildings by colleagues yet amongst us, and many by others gone to their long home. At the angle of the Sandhill stands the very fine Offices of the Royal Insurance Co., designed by Mr. PARNELL, and, further on, the huge commercial buildings of Lombard Street, Queen Street, King Street, the Sandhill, &c. While we are at the Riverside, we might, from the Quay, look for a moment at the High Level Bridge, one of the most Architectural Engineering Bridges in the country; its design may be obsolete, but it far and away excels the terrible wrought iron bridge a few hundred yards further west, which may be said to be entirely devoid of the faintest æsthetic design, and an insult to our time. Coming back to the foot of Grey Street, we now tackle by far the greater portion of our task, for we now start with the noble

buildings of GRAINGER and his Architects. One might write a volume in describing the numerous and varied buildings in this range, but we must content ourselves with a very cursory glance. Taken altogether, they form one of the most extraordinary instances of town building ever conceived and carried out by one man. Within a year or two they all practically fall within our period.

The buildings in Grey Street, Shakespeare Street, Market Street, Hood Street, Grainger Street, Nelson Street, Nun Street, and Clayton Street, yield a quantity and quality that should satisfy the most exacting.

As I said before, GRAINGER had the good sense to be guided by experienced Architects, hence we have the buildings well designed, which means both in detail, grouping, and in being useful. There are, especially in Grey Street, buildings of the finest Renaissance design, where students will find a wealth of material, and it must not be forgotten all these buildings are of genuine stone, not stuccoed and painted, and, when newly built, clean as they came from the hands of the mason ; and, seen in a brilliant sunshine, they would, indeed, resemble a veritable Palace of Architecture—a rebuilding of Rome.

To describe them all is out of the question, but we may just glance again at Grey Street, and the best view is to be obtained at the junction with Mosley Street. Here the full and graceful proportions of the whole is taken in, but not quite at one view, a circumstance which adds to the charm, for Grey Street not only ascends with a gentle gradient, but bends proudly away to the right with a noble sweep, passing on the way the Bank of England, the Theatre Royal, the group of the Exchange, with its finely designed domes, Lambtons' Bank, and terminating with the monumental column in memory of Earl GREY. They are familiar to us, but, possibly, like the prophet in his own country, not sufficiently appreciated. So subtle is the design of this street, that while rising and curving no harsh or abrupt treatment can be observed, each building, though separately designed, falls into one harmonious group.

We may now leave this mass of modern buildings, and may safely say they stand a lasting monument to the genius of RICHARD GRAINGER and his Architects, DOBSON, GREEN, WARDLE, and WALKER.

Grainger Street West has not yet been mentioned, which is a comparatively new street built since GRAINGER's days, and entirely by individual owners, the buildings being designed in every case by local Architects, the result being a great diversity of design, dating from the tail end of the Gothic revival down to the present time. I might also mention the new Offices of the Water Company and of the Gas Company.

I should weary you were I to name every important building in Newcastle that has been erected during the famous sixty years. My list, I am afraid, is but half complete, but I think I have enumerated enough to shew the enormous mass of commercial buildings that have been erected here in this period from the designs of our colleagues.

I will now run over, as quickly as I can, a few of the buildings that cannot be said to be commercial—the College of Medicine, by our friends Messrs. DUNN & HANSOM ; the College of Science, by the late R. J. JOHNSON, with whom I had the pleasure of being associated ; the Museum of Natural History, St. Stephen's Church, St. Aidan's, St. Michael's, St. Matthew's, St. Peter's, St. Mary's (Rye Hill), St. Dominic's, St. James', the Roman Catholic Cathedral, by PUGIN, with the tower and spire so ably added by our ex-president. This short list, taken at random, and which could be multiplied many times did time permit ; for, to tell the truth, I had not when I begun this Address realized the enormous task which I had set myself. I have not even said a word about the "works" and factories that abound with us, and in which Architecture is often called to aid, and possibly this Address will be incomplete were I not to mention that enormous hive of industry—the Elswick Works, where I have had the honour and privilege of carrying out some of the finest workshops in the world.

I asked, in the beginning of this Address, what account the Architects of Newcastle could give of themselves over the period under review, and I think the list mentioned is an answer to that question ; and, in saying this, one must always remember the continued tide of prosperity that has flowed through the entire period, emphasizing, in a marked degree, the brightest feature in Her Majesty's glorious reign.

While done with this subject for the present, I should just like to say a word on a kindred subject. It is a very common expression, even for Novocastrians, to condemn the city, and complain of want of good streets, of good street making, or of street cleaning. I am not a Newcastle man, although I have passed the greater portion of my life here, my opinion will, therefore, not partake of natal bias. I have been in many of the chief cities of England and Scotland, from time to time, and looked about me, and often with a view of finding anything better in this respect than we have in Newcastle, but have been unable to do so. Newcastle will hold its own, either in its Architecture or in its administration of cleanliness.

In speaking of the continued commercial prosperity, one often notices how in a busy practice commercial men often mould the ways of Architecture. The imperative demands of trade are often antagonistic to the precedence in Architecture ; for instance, take a familiar case, the shop windows of our city, or any city. There we shall find the busy man will insist on having his window in one square of glass, or, because he cannot get any glass large enough, he will divide them by gossamer bars. I am quite sure his goods would be

as well seen if shrined in Architectural encasements. I know the prevalence of this idea indicates history, but we may as well have good history as bad history.

It would seem also in walking through our streets that the Architecture will presently be "behind the scenes," in other words, be covered by huge letters of the alphabet. What is the cause of this trumpeting from the house fronts? Have we all become short-sighted that we cannot see to read a man's name in moderate letters? I once lost a good client for declining (politely I hope) to carry out some letters of this nature, over 9 feet high.

It has often been said that an Architect without the men of the building trades would be like the Commander-in-Chief without soldiers. The men of the building trades are our soldiers, and the excellence of their workmanship is of vital importance to us, and we cannot help but notice with regret the nearly total extinction of some trades, that is to say, as independent trades, for instance, the plasterers and joiners. This is accompanied by what is practically an extinguishment of the apprenticeship system, where the youth of our time learned to master the trades with which we are so much in contact. I am one of those who believe that the best technical school is the workshop, where an apprentice would be in actual touch with the *minutiae* of the trade by which he will hereafter earn his living. There is at present too much of the former, and too little of the latter. The apprenticeship system is self-acting, and costs nothing, and I am sure the results in producing good workmen would to Architects be a comfort.

I regret I am not yet in a position to announce the completion of the scheme of amalgamation with the Durham College of Science, whereby our students could attend and study kindred sciences to Architecture.

Our Secretary may, however, soon be able to announce a scheme of lectures on Architectural subjects in connection with the Institute, and which it is suggested shall be delivered in the provincial cities, to the cost of which it is hoped the Allied Societies will liberally contribute; and in this respect I do hope the contributions may be independent contributions, and not in any manner State-aided or Rate-aided, or, if so, I, personally am done with it.

I have to thank you for your patient attention.

